

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art

Prof. Funkhouser

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Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics"

\*The chief concern of aesthetic theory has been to come up with necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a work of art—this is an inquiry into the nature, essence, or Form of art.

--Weitz contends that this is not a productive line of inquiry, as there are no such necessary and sufficient conditions to be found.

\*Weitz then turns to considering various, failed definitions of 'art': e.g., Formalism (art as significant form), Emotionalism (art as the expression of emotion through a public, sensuous medium), Intuitionism (art as "an awareness, non-conceptual in character, of the unique individuality of things"), Organicism (art as a complex of interrelated parts), and Voluntarism (art as the unique combination of imagination, language, and harmony).

\*Following Wittgenstein, Weitz says that, instead of looking for the Form of art (or at least *before* doing so), we should examine how the word or concept 'art' is used in our language.

--Wittgenstein's example: What is a game?

There are no necessary and sufficient conditions—only *family resemblances*.

"Knowing what a game is is not knowing some real definition or theory but being able to recognize and explain games and to decide which among imaginary and new examples would or would not be called "games"." (15)

--There are *paradigm cases* of both games and works of art.

Open concept: "A concept is open if its conditions of application are emendable and corrigible; i.e., if a situation or case can be imagined or secured which would call for some sort of *decision* on our part to extend the use of the concept to cover this, or to close the concept and invent a new one to deal with the new case and its new property." (15)

--Because no necessary and sufficient conditions exist for being a work of art, art is an open concept.

--Weitz claims that only logical and mathematical concepts are closed. (15)

Q: Is Weitz correct in this claim?

--We do not *discover* the appropriate applications for open concepts, we *decide* on them.

\*Weitz claims that the novelty and adventurousness of art makes it incapable of definition. (16)

Q: But, given that Weitz thinks most concepts are open, are these properties of art even relevant to its openness? Would the existence of necessary and sufficient conditions for art limit the creativity and adventurousness of the art world?

\*Instead of searching for a definition, we should investigate how the concept of art is actually used and in what circumstances it is correctly employed.

--It is both *descriptive* and *evaluative*.

--Weitz's "criteria of recognition", for the descriptive use of 'art': "some sort of artifact, made by human skill, ingenuity, and imagination, which embodies in its sensuous, public medium—stone, wood, sounds, words, etc.—certain distinguishable elements and relations." (16)

--No individual criterion provides a necessary condition, but each work of art necessarily meets one (some) of these criteria.

--Weitz's "criteria of evaluation", for the evaluative use of 'art': Is all art, by definition, successful art?

\*Weitz concludes by suggesting that we view the traditional definitions of 'art' as offering points of emphasis—recommendations as to where artists should return their focus.